

1 Introduction

This report provides an overview of assistance given to clients and their accompanying children by the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) during the financial year 2005–06. This national report is accompanied by state and territory supplements.

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

SAAP is a major part of Australia's overall response to homelessness. It was established in 1985 to consolidate a number of Australian Government and state and territory government programs designed to assist people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless, including women and children escaping domestic violence.

The current program (SAAP V) is governed by the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994*. This specifies that the overall aim of SAAP is to provide transitional supported accommodation and related support services to help homeless people achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence.

Each year, the Program funds non-government, community or local government agencies that range from small stand-alone agencies with single outlets to auspices with multiple outlets. These agencies provide accommodation and support services to a range of groups: families, single men, single women, young people, and women and children escaping domestic violence.

The SAAP National Data Collection

The main source of data on the provision of services through SAAP is the SAAP National Data Collection, which consists of a number of distinct components, each of which can be thought of as a separate collection. Currently, three components exist: the Client Collection, the Administrative Data Collection and the Demand for Accommodation Collection. Appendix 1 provides an overview of these collections. This report mainly presents analysis of the Client Collection. Some analysis of funding using the Administrative Data Collection is also presented to provide context. A further report, *Demand for SAAP assistance by homeless people 2005–06*, includes coverage of the unmet needs of clients and the unmet demand for accommodation by potential clients gathered from the Demand for Accommodation Collection.

New Core Data Set

In 2005–06, a Core Data Set was introduced. Changes to the collection included refined definitions and a new statistical linkage key. The changes constitute a break in the series and therefore comparisons between this and previous years are not strictly possible (see Chapter 9 and Appendix 2 for more details).

Overview of the report

Accurate interpretation of the analyses presented here requires an understanding of the particular concepts and terms used in the National Data Collection. A glossary of terms is therefore included at the beginning of this report. In addition, readers are encouraged to consult Appendix 1 and the National Data Collection Agency (NDCA) collectors manual (AIHW 2005b).

The analyses in this report are divided into eight main areas, with detailed tables following the discussion in each chapter. A summary of each chapter is provided below.

Funding (Chapters 2 and 9)

Funding for the 1,300 SAAP agencies operating across Australia during 2005–06 was provided jointly by the Australian Government and the state and territory governments. For the 2005–06 financial year, the total recurrent allocation under SAAP was \$348.8m. In real terms, this was 20% more than the total funding provided in 1996–97. Included in this amount are recurrent allocations of \$24.9m provided by three jurisdictions in addition to the funding agreements between the Australian Government and each state and territory government.

Recurrent funding directly to agencies was \$333.4m. In real terms, this was 26% more than the funding provided in 1996–97.

Level of support (Chapters 3 and 9)

When clients and the children accompanying them are considered together, it is estimated that 1 in every 126 Australians received substantial SAAP support at some time during 2005–06. More specifically, SAAP agencies supported an estimated 161,200 people. Of these, 106,500 were adults or unaccompanied children (clients) and 54,700 were accompanying children.

Clients were provided with 180,000 occasions of support during 2005–06. The average number of support periods per client was 1.7. The majority of support periods did not include a period of accommodation.

There were 81,700 accompanying child support periods in 2005–06, with accompanying children averaging 1.4 support periods each. The majority of accompanying child support periods did not include a period of accommodation.

Age, sex, and cultural and linguistic diversity (Chapter 4)

There were more female clients (60%) than male clients (40%). The average age of female clients was 31 years and the average for male clients was 33 years. How often clients accessed SAAP services throughout the year varied according to the age and sex of the client, with repeat use in general higher for older male clients. Who was more likely to access SAAP services also varied according to age and sex, with young people, especially females, generally more likely to become a SAAP client.

There was little difference reported in the sex of accompanying children, 51% were girls and 49% were boys. The average age of accompanying children was 6 years.

Most SAAP clients and accompanying children were born in Australia and did not identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Client groups and reasons for seeking assistance (Chapter 5)

Nationally, over one-quarter (27%) of support periods were provided to males aged 25 years and over presenting alone (or with an unrelated person) at SAAP agencies, and 22% were provided to female clients with children. Females aged 25 years and over presenting alone (or with an unrelated person) accounted for 18%, and unaccompanied females under 25 years accounted for 13% of support periods. This was followed by unaccompanied males aged under 25 years (11% of support periods), couples with children (4%) and couples without children (3%). Males with children accounted for 1% of all support periods.

In at least 23% of their support periods, SAAP clients presented with accompanying children. In the majority (86%) of these, children accompanied a female client, in 10% they accompanied a couple and in 5% a male client. Other family groups with children accounted for less than 1%.

Nationally, the most common main reasons that clients gave for seeking assistance were domestic or family violence (in 22% of support periods), relationship or family breakdown (10%) and other financial difficulty (10%).

Length of support and accommodation (Chapter 6)

Of the 180,000 support periods in 2005–06, approximately 158,600 finished on or before 30 June 2006. Nationally, 52% of all closed support periods lasted for 1 week or less, and 26% lasted for less than 1 day, 17% lasted from 1 week to 1 month, 18% lasted from 1 month to 3 months, 7% lasted from 3 months to 6 months and 6% lasted for longer than 6 months.

The median length of support Australia-wide was 6 days. The mean length of support Australia-wide was 48 days.

Support provided to clients and accompanying children (Chapter 6)

The services commonly provided to clients varied markedly according to the person or group being assisted, because of their varying needs. However, the three broad types of support services most often provided to clients during 2005–06 were general support or advocacy (in 75% of support periods), housing or accommodation services (60%), and personal support services (52%). Specialist services were the least likely to be provided (23%).

The services commonly provided to accompanying children varied according to who they accompanied. However, overall, SAAP or CAP accommodation was the most commonly provided type of service (in 65% of accompanying child support periods) followed by basic support services (61%). Specialist services were the least often provided broad group of services (17%).

Meeting the needs of clients and accompanying children (Chapter 7)

After a client has finished receiving support, it is possible to review which needs were or were not met during that support period. To do this, the services the client required are examined according to whether they were unmet, referred only or provided by the end of the client's support.

Overall, SAAP agencies were able to directly meet the needs of clients in the majority of cases (in 88% of required services). In addition to this, agencies were able to refer clients to other organisations in a further 7% of cases.

Direct provision of basic support services, such as meals and laundry or shower facilities, and general support and advocacy was particularly high for clients (97% and 95%, respectively, of these service types were provided when required). Requirements for housing or accommodation services were met directly in 81% of cases. Agencies were least successful in meeting the requirement for specialist services (65%). However, generally, as direct provision of a required service fell, referrals increased, so that clients received far more referrals for specialist services than other types of services.

Overall SAAP agencies were able to meet the needs of accompanying children in the vast majority of cases (in 92% of the service types required for accompanying children). In addition to this, agencies were able to refer accompanying children for another 5% of required services.

Basic support services were the group of services most often provided directly to accompanying children (in 98% of required services), followed by general support and advocacy (94%), and accommodation (90%). Specialist services were the least likely to be provided directly by agencies when required (70%). As for clients, the less likely a service was to be provided, the more likely it was to be referred. Thus, the most likely group of services to be referred for accompanying children when they could not be provided directly were specialist services – such services were referred in 24% of requirements for this service type.

Circumstances of clients before and after support (Chapter 8)

Across all closed support periods, clients' main source of income did not vary much from before to after support. However, when clients specifically required assistance to obtain or maintain a government pension or benefit, there was a marked improvement. For example, the proportion of closed support periods in which clients had no income fell from 22% before support to 9% after support and the proportion receiving a government payment increased from 71% to 84%. This provides a measure of the success of SAAP in assisting clients to obtain or maintain the benefits they required.

The majority of SAAP clients were not in paid employment (not in the labour force or were unemployed and looking for work) on entry to and exit from SAAP support. When examined for all closed support periods, there were only small changes in the employment profile of clients from before to after support. Among those clients who required assistance in the area of employment and training during their period of support, there was a marked increase in the proportion in paid work following support. These clients were employed in some capacity following 20% of closed support periods, more than double the figure of 8% before support.

Generally positive housing outcomes were reported for clients following support for all clients and those who required assistance to obtain or maintain independent housing. The most common type of house or dwelling occupied both before and after support was a house or flat and the majority of clients had some form of tenure both before and after support. Both living in a house or flat and having some form of tenure increased following SAAP support.

In general, the longer a client was supported, the more likely they were to have a positive outcome in terms of income, employment and accommodation after exiting SAAP support.

Support from 1996–97 to 2005–06 (Chapter 9)

Chapter 9 outlines the number of support periods, clients, accompanying children and accompanying child support periods as well as the participation and valid consent rates over the 10 years of the National Data Collection. However, it is important to note when examining trends over the 10 years of the collection that refined definitions and a new statistical linkage key were introduced in 2005–06. This has effectively meant a break in the series and data for 2005–06 are not strictly comparable to previous years.

Appendixes

This report contains three appendixes. Appendix 1 contains important information about estimation methods, measurement of concepts, examples for table interpretation, and counting rules used in the analyses in this report. Appendix 2 presents a summary of the changes to the Client Collection in 2005–06. Appendix 3 contains a copy of the client form used to collect data in 2005–06.

